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Why the Endangered Species Act Shouldn't be Endangered

The Trump Administration has announced that they intend to rework the endangered species act. Unsurprisingly, they plan to rework in ways that have the potential to undermine its effectiveness.

One would think that reworking the act would potentially increase its effectiveness, given the nearly fifty years that we have had to advance our knowledge since it was passed. Unfortunately, the opposite may very well be true.

The new changes to the act would allow for the decision of whether or not to list an animal to be made not just by scientific data, but also by determining the economic impact of listing an animal.

When considering the purpose of the act, saving species from extinction, these changes seem to violate that premise. For example, if an arbitrary species is up for consideration to be listed, but it's habitat is an area owned by a coal company planning to dig a mine, the greed from the economic possibility of constructing a coal mine will almost certainly cloud the judgement of those making the decision.

It feels completely backwards to think that a greedy coal baron could potentially hold the fate of a species in his hands, but there is no way to stop him, because the value of the coal mine was used to determine whether or not a species should be listed.

The people also seem to be in favor of the endangered species act. Research also backs this up, as a study by Jeremy Bruskotter of Ohio State University says, "approximately 83 percent of the public supports it."

This is because people see value in the act. There is an inherent ethical saving species. I'm sure many people don't know what a pika is, so go ahead and take the time to look that up. Now knowing what that is, you can't tell me that there is not a tremendous amount of value in keeping them around.

Not only is there an ethical value, but biodiversity is of tremendous value to ecosystems. Whether or not people realize it, healthy ecosystems are the source of much of their food. Many fish species that people eat are caught in the wild, where a healthy ecosystem allows them to exist in abundance.

If you take away the biodiversity of ecosystems by allowing endangered species to go extinct, you run the risk of letting the food web get out of whack, potentially hurting the numbers of the fish that people want to consume.

Now you may be asking yourself why is there 17% of the public that is opposed to the endangered species act, do they know something that the rest of us do not? This may be the case.

According to the Washington Examiner, the endangered species act may be costing the economy hundreds of billions of dollars more than they estimated. Now this is undeniably an extremely high cost, and not something that should be taken lightly.

With that said, a study by Southwick Associates has found the “Combined Value of Outdoor Recreation, Nature Conservation and Historic Preservation” to be roughly \$1.06 trillion. This field also includes an estimated 9.4 million jobs. Much of this would not be possible without the endangered species act.

Looking at the numbers from a more personal scale, a study done by John B. Loomis, and Douglas S. White show that the per household value of many endangered species, such as the Northern Spotted Owl, is much higher than the per household cost of protecting them.

While the cost of the endangered species act may be extensive, the economic benefits provided by it are tremendous. Not only does it provide jobs and an opportunity for people to see amazing animals, the cost of protecting them is much lower for the average American than the value they receive from it.

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